

6 November 1978

C.I.A. Head Accused of Tailoring Estimates to Policy; He Denies It

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 5. — Adm. Stansfield Turner, Director of Central Intelligence, is being accused in the intelligence community of distorting estimates to make them dovetail with the Carter Administration's foreign policy. He denies the allegations.

The estimates cover long-range prognoses on such issues as Soviet military capabilities, the balance of forces on the Korean Peninsula, Soviet strategic intentions in the Indian Ocean and the outlook for energy production worldwide, particularly in the Soviet Union. Often they form a basis for far-reaching policy decisions by the President on foreign relations and defense priorities.

As described by one of the director's critics, an official in the intelligence community, "Turner has been highly dissatisfied with a large number of national intelligence estimates, and he has been more demanding and more pre-emptive than any Director of Central Intelligence in recent times."

Heavy Involvement Acknowledged

In an interview Admiral Turner acknowledged that he had heavily involved himself in the production of the so-called national intelligence estimates — considered the most important product of the American intelligence community — as well as in lesser estimate and analysis functions. However, he maintained that he had neither distorted estimates nor manipulated them to serve White House policy goals.

"If I am ever suspected of slanting estimates in favor of policy I will be much less useful," he said. "If I wanted to influence policy I would have to be so subtle. If detected it would reverse the effect."

The allegations have come to light in various branches of the intelligence community — military and civilian — and in the Central Intelligence Agency itself, where the 55-year-old director remains a controversial figure 19 months after taking charge.

None of his critics deny his technical right to take charge of the production of intelligence estimates, which is authorized under executive orders. As in the past, the national estimates are issued under the director's name; what has changed, it appears, is Admiral Turner's involvement in what he describes as restructuring and redrafting.

"Convince, Cajole or Bully"

In a number of instances, according to the critic of Admiral Turner in the intelligence community, he has "asked the community to redo the estimates or has rewritten them and sent them on without further reference to the National Foreign Intelligence Board, or he has sent them back to convince, cajole or bully the other participants into alternative estimates." As a result, this official and others said, there have been noticeable delays in the production of estimates.

In the interview, at C.I.A. headquarters in McLean, Va., Admiral Turner commented on these allegations: "I have no hesitation to delay an estimate a week or two, or a month or two. I have not slowed up any where there was an urgency to get it to the consumer."

As to the question of rewriting estimates put together by teams in various parts of the intelligence community, he commented: "I am not bashful about that. I end up telling them this section has to be redrafted. You won't find many sentences I personally penned. Mostly it is because they didn't bring out two views strongly. Another way, I look at the outline, the concept at the beginning, and I restructure that, saying, You are asking the question wrong."

One redrafting that caused controversy in the community last year concerned an estimate of the balance of strength between North Korea and South Korea pinned to the question of what withdrawal of 40,000 United States troops stationed in

the South would mean. Admiral Turner concluded, contrary to the original estimate, that withdrawal would substantially diminish the deterrent balance on the peninsula. He won praise from some C.I.A. analysts on that one and criticism from other quarters.

There was another controversy last year over the national estimate on Soviet intentions in the Indian Ocean, which was also held up for redrafting by Admiral Turner and ended up with what some termed a predictable bias toward gloom. "People thought they were dealing with the Lord High Admiral," a Defense Department analyst remarked.

Lately the concern of the critics has focused on the question whether Admiral Turner has used his function as the court of last resort on estimates to support Administration policy. This criticism arose over data on the Soviet economy, particularly its energy sector, where he was alleged to favor "worst case" analysis to suggest that the United States could effectively apply pressure on the Soviet Union through denial of exports of advanced technology.

Carter Ordered Top-Level Review

Last summer President Carter drew on some of these estimates in making his decision to order top-level review of all such export deals with the Soviet Union and to delay authorization of a sale of oil-drill bits for a time, intelligence officials said.

One of those critical of Admiral Turner put the situation this way: "The great trap of intelligence is to search for evidence supporting your own view. That is forbidden territory, and if you have access to policy makers you can become sensitized into justifying their decisions." This critic said that Admiral Turner's estimations of Soviet energy development "was a classic of transgression."

The director, replying to the allegations, said: "I have no policy-making function. It is mandatory that I present good estimates." He acknowledged, however, that he had dispensed with the long-time practice of registering dissenting views as footnotes, incorporating them in his final text instead.

Black Crayon on Beige Blackboard

A man given to diagramming since his active duty in the Navy, which included a tour at NATO, he moved from his chair to a beige blackboard in his seventh-floor office and wrote out with a black crayon: "One man estimating," "Estimating by committee" and "N.F.I.B.," the abbreviation for the National Foreign Intelligence Board. He explained that his system was to have an estimate prepared by the community and submitted to the board, which he chairs. "At that point the one-man system comes in, because I decide, I sign for it, I vouch for it," he said. "I am the chief intelligence officer for the country."

Another policy area where critics find fault with Admiral Turner concerns his penchant for publishing and widely distributing sanitized versions of intelligence estimates and analyses. An analysis issued last summer by his recently established National Foreign Assessment Center entitled "The Scope of Poland's Economic Dilemma" enraged State Department officials because it cut across the Administration's policy of supporting Polish efforts to cope with balance-of-payment and trade deficits.

"No comment," Admiral Turner replied to a query on the matter, but he then said: "When things deserve to be published they'll be published. I am pleased there is so much concern. Everybody puts out right and left here. In short, they are excited because we made them work harder. I don't think putting out facts can be inimical to United States policy."

He sat back and grinned: "It's an antithesis. On the one hand I am prostituted to policy and on the other I am undermining policy."